



EUMedEA Working Papers



UNIVERSITÀ
degli STUDI
di CATANIA

The European Refugee Response: Lessons learnt from the EU Turkey Statement

Georg Gassauer

Independent Researcher

Georg.gassauer@gmail.com



JM Chair EU MEDiterranean border crises and European External Action (EUMedEA)

Project number: 565729-EPP-1-2015-1-IT-EPPJMO-CHAIR

© Copyright 2018, Jean Monnet Centre, Department of Political and Social Sciences,
University of Catania, Via Vittorio Emanuele 49, 95131, Catania, Italy.

ISSN 2499-2402

EUMedEA Online Working Paper Series, 3-2017

Abstract

This commentary reviews the European refugee response one year after the borders along the western Balkan route were sealed and the EU-TR statement was signed. It argues that while official numbers of refugees crossing the Aegean have dropped dramatically, senior policy makers continue to neglect new problems that have arisen as a consequence of these actions. The paper sets out why Europe has not used the last twelve months more effectively to prepare for a new mass migratory movement and moves on to show that these same reasons have ensured that too few resources and too little attention is being committed to improving human security conditions in the refugee camps along the western Balkan route. Exploring how ignoring human error has allowed disillusionment to manifest itself within those that service the policy mechanisms, this essay proves that corrupted data gathering and ultimately flawed policy responses due to a lack of quality management are eroding confidence in government institutions. The paper is based on interviews with stakeholders along the “frontline” of this crisis between Vienna and the Turkish Syrian border town of Kilis.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD - Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency(Turkey)

AMIF - Asylum Migration & Integration Fund (EU)

EASO - European Asylum Support Office (EU)

ECHO - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (EU)

EUTS - EU-Turkey Statement

EURODAC - European Dactyloscopy

FYROM - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

SIS II – Schengen Information System

UNODC - United Nations Organisation on Drugs Crime

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VIS – Visa Information System

DGMM - Director General Migration Management (Turkey)

1. Introduction

The European refugee response marks its first anniversary as the diplomatic crisis between the European states and Turkey continues to oscillate more violently out of control. A crisis fuelled by the Turkish leadership's ambition to accelerate the governmental reform that would place more executive powers in the hands of incumbent president Erdogan. By annulling a key element of the EU-Turkey Statement and refusing to accept deported refugees from the Greek islands, the Turkish government is sending a clear, symbolic message that it is finalizing the necessary steps to fully cancel the Statement¹.

Although the Turkish leadership has made similar threats throughout the year, a "Plan B," or a series of emergency mechanisms in Greece to deal with such an eventuality have not materialized. This of course begs the question, why have key personalities in the European corridors of power ignored such essential preparation, especially in light of their inability to take precautions in 2015?

To answer this, it is necessary to review the policy mechanisms themselves and how they have developed over the last twelve months. A closer inspection will highlight that a distance has emerged between policy makers and those that are tasked with its implementation. This is due to a number factors: firstly, there is an overburdening on the structures that are designated to deal with migration and refugees flows (FRONTEX, EASO, national asylum offices and unhinging of the EURODAC system, to name but a few), resulting from the inability to heed warnings and prepare for such a mass movement of people. Secondly, the continual stress on formal structures in turn led to a rapid decline in quality policy implementation. Finally, this has allowed for the margin of human error to continuously increase which has ultimately allowed a host of new security concerns to emerge; a decline in human security in camps; radicalization and the formation of new and sophisticated smuggling syndicates in Europe. Combined this means that if the EUTS is abruptly annulled Europe will face a multitude of new threats and challenges (economic, human and potentially military) that were not present in 2015.

By assessing official EU and member state reports concerning migratory movements and activities, and comparing them with the author's field research over the last year, it becomes evident that there is a disconnect between the reports that policy makers rely on and what implementing stakeholders experience on a daily basis. As official

¹ This annulment is a symbolic gesture as Turkey had its customs and asylum officials pulled off the Greek islands in late 2016. In addition to this due to Greek legal juxtapositions (see footnote 4) only 848 refugees were in actual fact deported.

reports focus heavily on datasets and statistics that show there are clear declines in refugee's arrivals, or that funds have been delegated, they marginalize irregularities and random events occurring out of plain sight. Understanding, and acting upon these however is essential as they are the quiet undercurrents that lead to long-term disruptions in crisis management.

Mayor Angelopoulou of Samos, condenses this into a surrealist metaphor when trying to describe this distance or disconnect that is derailing any serious attempt to manage the refugee crisis: "If they are led to believe in the magic of numbers, this will be their reality."²

The following pages look to bridge this distance by focusing on the turbulences that border closures and the EUTS has left in their wake. It looks specifically at the over reliance on datasets; failure to prepare or create a "Plan B"; disillusionment of implementing partners; deterioration of camp conditions along the Balkan Route; and finally, the impact the refugee crisis is having on a municipal level. These factors, combined with an increasingly polarized European society, ensure that if it should come to a new mass-movement, Europe will be logistically unprepared as it lacks the political, material and human resources required for effective crisis management.

Finally this commentary argues that the current politics of appeasement towards Turkey also indicates that an essential reflective process regarding the faulty "policy-mechanics" that led to the EUTS' disorganized implementation has not taken place³. A process that is critical if the EU and its member states are serious about using the EUTS as a template for an exportable foreign policy tool to manage migration flows from Libya.

2.0 EU-Turkey Relations

As European governments have centered their efforts on other key issues such as Brexit, integration, terrorism and the rise of new nationalism over the last 12 months, they relied on the new Status Quo the EU Turkey Statement offered as a pillar of stability. Unwilling to disrupt this status, policy makers and analysts argued that the

² Statement by Michalis Angelopoulou, Mayor of Samos, in Athens, 22 June 2016.

³ The implementation of the "rapid return" mechanism in the Statement has been the most hotly contested. It relies mainly on the 21 day "fast-track" asylum process which was to be implemented by the Greeks with assistance from the EU's European Asylum Support Office after midnight on March 19. However this almost immediately ran astray on the grounds of legal technicalities as Greek law states that nobody can be detained in closed facilities for longer than 25 days. Hence, even if the Greek asylum services with its 256 (in March 2016) case officers had not been so overwhelmed by the thousands of new asylum applications being filed on the Greek Mainland every day, this 21 day fast track program was cutting it close by any means as the procedure was meant to compact all the steps of the asylum process into one smooth process: i.e. application, background check, decision, and appeal.

formalization of a Plan B would send a message of distrust to their Turkish counterparts.

In the meantime, Turkish diplomats engaged in subtle provocations that aimed at the confining legal and political parameters surrounding the European implementation of the EUTS. Specifically, the slow transfer of funds, mainly attributed to lengthy European tendering procedures, or the faltering visa liberalization attributed to the disagreement of Article 8 of the Turkish Anti-Terror law.⁴ To European policy makers these seemed acceptable as a decrease in arrivals in Greece indicated that the EUTS was showing immediate efficacy. Unfortunately, decision-makers continue to attribute the financial vehicle (€3.6 Billion) made available to Turkey through the EUTS to assist with the support of 3 million persons with *Temporary Protection Status*⁵ as the “deal-breaker.” The loss of which, they falsely assume, would force Turkish politicians to err on the side of caution and maintain the agreement.

By publicly highlighting this slow implementation however, the Turkish government has been able to galvanize domestic public opinion while at the same time increasing pressure on the EU to speed up processes specific to the EUTS, such as the transfer of funds. Although this type of pressure runs counter to the EU procurement mechanisms, designed to prevent the misallocation of funds, the EU has accelerated tendering processes. This ultimately leads into long term government planning to reduce the influence of foreign NGOs operating inside Turkey and place full control of social welfare programs in the remit of the government bodies or state run NGOs.⁶

This appeasement from the side of the Europeans to maintain the agreement at all costs has allowed the Turkish leadership to cross almost every “red-line” that had been set out. Allowing them to undertake key reforms without any serious international repercussions, such as: the reshuffle of the judiciary, lifting the

⁴ Visa liberalization and the redefinition of Article 8 of the anti-terror law were seen as main points of contention between the EU and Turkey, or where at least portrayed as such in the media. With the focus on Article 8, which has been a repeated point of contention between the then EEC and Turkey since the 1970's Pettifer, J. (1998). *The Turkish Labyrinth*. London, UK: Penguin Books..

⁵ *Temporary Protection Status* is a legal status that is only given to Syrians and not Iraqis or Afghans. Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugee, it has not implemented the amendment of 1962 that lifts the geographical limitations of the origins of a refugee. Thus legally in Turkey, only citizens from European countries and the former USSR are able to apply and receive official refugee status. Today this has implications on Afghans and Iraqis as they are not awarded Temporary Protection Status. Would the mechanism of the EUTS work, citizens of these countries would be deported to their countries of origin almost immediately as Turkey has signed repatriation agreements with them.

⁶ EU diplomats not wanting to be identified confirmed that the Turkish government has not been able to highlight where the 10 billion Euros they have spent on the refugee crisis has been allocated. The EU diplomats also stated that most of the funding has gone towards contractors that are close to the AKP and continuously warn Brussels that any easing of fund procedures could push EU funds in to similar pockets, ultimately funding AKP contributors.

immunity granted to parliamentarians and subsequently arresting the mainly pro-Kurdish HDP politicians, change the educational curriculum and granted retroactive immunity from prosecution to security personnel that engaged in anti-terror operations, to name but a few. This has given the AKP leadership the political confidence to stand up to the Europeans and has ultimately paved the way for a controversial referendum without any international consequences.

3.0 Losing Faith

As European governments are still in disagreement over the efficacy of a “Plan B” with the potential message of distrust this could send to Turkey, it seems they are unaware of the message this sends to its own citizens: the inability to enforce the social contract by failing to provide physical protection of the individual through collective security. This is especially bitter considering that since 2013 European governments have not adequately taken seriously the warning signals provided to them by the intelligence community, international NGOs, or other governments concerning an impending mass-migratory movement, and have failed to take the necessary precautions.

This is not only causing a dissonance between citizens and their governmental institutions but is causing disruptions within the official structures themselves. In particular, public servants tasked with servicing the policy mechanisms are losing faith in their superiors’ ability to design coherent strategies that take their “on-the-ground” needs and realities into consideration. This results in disillusionment, misinterpretation of orders or in the worst cases apathy among officials.⁷ As many government policies are de facto implemented by NGOs, such trends are also emerging among NGO staff in the field.

In Belgrade for example, not all refugee arrivals in the city are officially recorded, as police officers on patrol have either been instructed not to register refugees or they no longer see the necessity in the procedure as almost all refugees ‘disappear’ to squats in suburbs and leave the city within a few hours.⁸ Not only has this allowed a

⁷ Underpayment is also a contributing factor for loose border controls between Balkan states. FYROM and Serbian border guards receive an equivalent of €500,- a month salary.

⁸ Only very few refugees passing through Hungary, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), or Greece want seek protection there. Police and border officers tasked with the physical duty of servicing the policy mechanisms of the March 7 border closure refer to filling quotas set for them by their governments. Low in morale, there is little incentive to conduct rigorous checks on border crossings that would reach or exceed quotas. Alternatively, push-backs of refugees to Bulgaria are common up to 50 kilometers within Serbia’s borders, as a similar approach to push-backs is taken in these countries and refugees try repeatedly to enter the EU through these borders. Therefore the real number of those entering northern Europe can only be an estimate at best and based on the number of refugees apprehended on the Austrian borders, the German/Austrian border, and on those that have applied for asylum in northern Europe since March 2016.

new smuggling ring to flourish,⁹ it also has serious consequences as it leads to faulty data gathering and transmission to more senior government departments, who then transmit this to intra-national governmental bodies. Similar scenarios in cities and towns along the Balkan route undermine efforts to understand how many refugees are in transit and, ultimately, how to allocate funding.¹⁰

Identifying how many refugees have entered Europe and how many are in transit is difficult by any means due to the clandestine nature of irregular migratory movements along the western Balkan route. Identification however is made more difficult as the EURODAC and the Schengen Information System (SIS II) designed to record and identify migrant data became unhinged through the escalation of the refugee crisis in late 2015.¹¹ Specifically this has meant that authorities processing new refugee arrivals in Europe are not able to exchange valuable information necessary when refugees settle in their desired country and thus transition from refugee to asylum applicant. This has effectively paralyzed the Dublin Convention. It should be noted that as most refugees are aware of the Dublin Convention procedures regarding the first country of entry as the country of asylum, many refused to be registered in Greece, Hungary or Slovenia, waiting instead until they have arrived in their country of choice: Austria, Germany, or Sweden.

Although these European countries have in due course accelerated their efforts to sign bilateral readmission agreements with countries of origin (Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iraq) such agreements have lengthy negotiating procedures and a “back-flow” of failed asylum-applicants along the Balkan route has started to take place. This is due to the fact that most negative asylum cases, now refugees again, exit their host country via their port of entry.¹² During the height of the refugee crisis in 2015/2016 the density of individuals crossing the borders overwhelmed the security forces and border agencies.

⁹ Depending on ethnic origin of refugee groups there are different modus operandi of smugglers. A majority of Afghan refugees for example pay for their journey through the Hawala system, which is paid in full through down payments of either property, opium, or female family members before commencing on the journey. Members of the UN Counter Terrorism Expert interviewed for this paper refer to finding detailed contracts in Kandahar regulating the passage to Europe. Those from Arab countries on the contrary pay in segments. Here, a large variety of price-related services are offered. At the top end are those willing to pay thousands of US dollars (standard currency on the Balkan route) who are given false documents and almost guaranteed entry to the Schengen zone, while at the bottom end of the spectrum refugees are escorted to within 10 kilometers of the Serb/Hungarian border and handed a set of wire cutters.

¹⁰ In an interview with the Turkish Director General Migration Management (DGMM) it was revealed that due to a lack of cooperation from the side of Greece and the EU on biometric data exchange, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Turkey and the DGMM were unable to assess how many refugees that registered in Turkey had moved on to Europe between May 2015 and March 2016. This has meant that the statistics of refugees present in Turkey are gravely flawed and inaccurate. Given that there was no data or identity exchange between the EU and Turkey they could never detract the number of those that left, although a major recount was planned for the end of July has now been postponed. These are the same statistics that the EU based its financial assistance tools on under the EUTS.

¹¹ European Commission, COM(2016)272 final, Proposal, European Commission (Brussels, 2016).

¹² This modus operandi is meant to hold until the Dublin Convention procedures are reinstated and refugees can be deported directly back to Greece. The European Commission aims to reinstate the Dublin Convention for March 2017. European Commission, COM(2016)272 final, Proposal, European Commission (Brussels, 2016).

As a result many refugees that entered central Europe either did not launch an asylum application immediately upon entry or where not issued a Schengen visa. Thus their fingerprints or other personal information was not registered into EURODAC or SIS II data management systems. In due course this made the implementation of the Dublin III regulation unrealistic as nobody could, strictly speaking, identify the first point of entry to the EU of a would be asylum candidate.

This also led to reinforce a small flow of refugees/migrants from North to South Europe. This, to date under-researched, phenomena has its root in the myriad of technical and legal directives and regulations at a European level creating a loose legal framework allowing negative asylum cases from one Member State to reapply for asylum status in other Member States.

As a result, national asylum offices are currently unable to differentiate between “new” arrivals from the Balkan or Central Mediterranean route making their first application and those that have just been rejected from neighboring European countries and are making their second or even third bid in European country.¹³ Additionally, as the EURODAC, SIS II and the Visa-Information System (VIS) are by design inoperable alongside each other the information exchange between Member State national police forces, border protection agencies and asylum authorities, on applicants is virtually impossible.¹⁴

Invariably this, in has lead to increasing frustration of case-workers across Member States, in particular Germany¹⁵, who lose access to essential information on applicants due to vague formulations of data transferal after an asylum applicant has left the national territory of another Member state¹⁶. Additionally the 18-month data storage limit on EURODAC servers, but also protocols that limit access of other member states to critical information to the "Hit-No-Hit" method prohibits the

¹³ “It will also be necessary to store information on illegally staying third-country nationals and those apprehended entering the EU irregularly at the external border for longer than what is currently permitted. A storage period of 18 months is the maximum permitted under the current Regulation for those apprehended at the external border and no data is retained for those found illegally staying in a Member State. This is because the current EURODAC Regulation is not concerned with storing information on irregular migrants for longer than what it necessary to establish the first country of entry under the Dublin Regulation if an asylum application had been made in a second Member State”. European Commission, COM(2016)272 final, Proposal, European Commission (Brussels, 2016).

¹⁴ European Commission, COM(2016)272 final, Proposal, European Commission (Brussels, 2016).

¹⁵ Der Gesamt Personalrat beim Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Offener Brief an den Leiter des BAMF Herrn Dr. h.c. Weise, Nürnberg, 2015

¹⁶ Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, OJ L180/1.

exchange of deeper biographical information on asylum applicants¹⁷. This adds to the difficulties of assessing the legitimacy of new claims.¹⁸

This has invariably led to longer processing and administrative backlogs which are only now, 2017, beginning to be overcome. This also partly due to the lack of human resources available at national asylum agencies. To give an example of the strain this placed on the human resources of national authorities tasked with processing asylum cases; in 2015 88.340 individuals applied for asylum in Austria while the *Bundesamt für Fremdwesen und Asyl* (BFA) only had 689 employees¹⁹ in Germany, 476.649 individuals applied for Asylum while the *Bundesagentur für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF)²⁰ only had 2.400 employees²¹, of which only a portion are case workers.

Not only has this made gathering of essential information difficult, it also exposes host communities to security threats as they allow refugees with potentially questionable motives to assume new identities as they enter Europe.²² This becomes evident when reviewing the abundance of falsified Syrian documents in circulation²³ that can be obtained on the black market by jihadist returnees, war criminals, or regular criminals in Beirut, Gaziantep, or Istanbul.²⁴ Thus, there is a large degree of ambiguity surrounding the ability of European states to verify an individual's true identity²⁵.

4.0 Structured deterioration

The lack of a coherent operational strategy and its negative impact on the motivation of implementing stakeholders and refugees is exemplified by the structured deterioration of conditions in refugee accommodation in Greece's "Hotspot" islands and on the Greek mainland.

As mentioned above, the windfall of arrivals is mostly attributed to the efficient crackdown on smuggler networks near Izmir by Turkish authorities, specifically

¹⁷ Study on the exchange of information between European countries regarding persons excluded from refugee status in accordance with Article 1F Refugee Convention, Bolhuis & van Wijk, 2015

¹⁸ By contrast, in an interview with Turkish DGMM policy analysts it was revealed that Turkish authorities had created its own 14- day fast-track program that would be based on the decisions of the European countries and would also include similar steps. However, as the intended pace of returns to Turkey from Greece were never accelerated from the European side, and as such this has not been activated.

¹⁹ Bundesamt für Fremdwesen und Asyl, 2015-Das Jahr der Steigerungen, 2016

²⁰ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2015, 2016

²¹ Spiegel Online, Bund will 2000 zusätzliche Bearbeiter für Asylanträge einstellen, 2015

²² European Commission. (2016). *COM(2016)272 final*. Proposal, European Commission, Brussels.

²³ Before Aleppo and Homs fell to the rebel and Islamist groups, many civil servants fled with the necessary equipment to produce and sell counterfeit passports and other documents in Izmir, Istanbul, or Ankara.

²⁴ Younes, A. (15. 11 2015). How easy is it to obtain a fake Syrian passport? *Al Jazeera*.

²⁵ Der Gesamt Personalrat beim Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Offener Brief an den Leiter des BAMF Herrn Dr. h.c. Weise, Nürnberg, 2015

marked by indiscriminate roadblocks along the main coastal roads and increased raids on smuggling networks, and the patrolling of NATO ships in the Aegean straits. However, it often goes underreported that refugees arriving on the islands after midnight on 20 March 2016 are not permitted to leave the islands.²⁶ As a result, newly arrived refugees have started to accumulate in accommodation centers designed for temporary use only. Thus, over the last twelve months almost 26,000 refugees have found themselves crammed into five Hotspots designed for 8,000.²⁷

Despite receiving €700 million from the European Union through various funds such as the EU's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), no additional financial resources from the central (Greek) government have been invested into expanding current accommodation capacity or, at the very least, to ensure that additional protection is provided for their inhabitants.²⁸ Although repetitive warnings of deteriorating human security²⁹ on the islands are sent to the Greek central government and the EU, little seems to have changed over the course of the last year.³⁰ This decline in security is mainly attributed to over-crowded camps, the lack of information on the progress of asylum cases,³¹ and the resulting increasing inter-ethnic violence.³² This said, the hiring freeze imposed on the Greek government as part of the economic adjustment program does not make overcoming these challenges easy.³³ Ultimately though, the lack of funding and

²⁶ The failure of the controversial one-for-one mechanism to work due to misinterpretations of Greece's legal norms; the lack of human resources necessary to implement the 21-day fast track scheme required for the deportations; but also that Greece's court of appeals on Lesbos questioned the legality of the deportations has ensured only 848 refugees have been deported.

²⁷ Even this statistic is questionable as although officially the site can only house 750 refugees, in officially it has been 550 as 3 containers were removed to provide offices for Frontex and EU European Asylum Support Office (EASO) officers and more containers were destroyed by fire that ensued after a riot between central Asian and Arab inhabitants.

²⁸ On Samos for example, only 5 police officers are entrusted to watch a camp of 2,000.

²⁹ In the hotspots and in the camps it is not uncommon for young women to engage in "survival sex" to sustain themselves and their families. Patterns on Lesbos are already emerging of petty theft and gang violence. Homeowners around the hot spot camp of Moria are complaining to the local municipality about security.

³⁰ This is not only the case on the islands as the poor living conditions, mismanaged registration procedures and an inability to employ more staff to process Asylum cases is creating a very tense situation in urban centers on the mainland and on the islands. As the population is increasingly getting to understand *who* the refugees are, the cultural differences between Greeks and Syrians and Afghanis will become more apparent. In particular as in the overcrowded and badly organized camps the inter-ethnic divisions between religious groups and nationalities are beginning to show. For example a group of ca. 800 Yazidis, mobbed and attacked in Piraeus has been moved Skaramanca. As the movement has become stationary, the Greeks will have to learn how to cope with sectarianism but also how to integrate the refugees. The latter task will be the most challenging considering the high unemployment rate in Greece (the deputy mayor of Chios mentioned that most Greeks under the age of 25 have never held a job) and the Greek language is very difficult to learn, thus deriding motivation from the migrants as their ultimate goal is northern Europe.

³¹ As the current asylum office in Greece in March 2017 has only 650 employees to process 67,000 claims (EASO can provide only limited support), many refugees are now in what one observer calls "limboland" and are unable to move on to their destination country or, even if they had the desire to do so, go back to Turkey. The hiring freeze has meant that the Greek ministry of migration, the body in charge for asylum claims, has been chronically understaffed for the last three years and retraining officials from other posts to a qualified level has not been as rapid as anticipated. Additionally, cooperation between contracted asylum officers from EASO, EU member states, and Greek officials is often challenging due to long bureaucratic bottle necks, increasing workloads, and the unofficial government stance that it must be understood is that Greek officials should process and determine asylum claims rather than foreign nationals.

³² Conducting interviews with refugees and social workers in Turkey, it was revealed that the inter-ethnic violence within the refugee flows only really starts after the refugees would cross the Aegean. As Syrians in Turkey, with the temporary protection status, are given separate housing and privileges to non-Syrians. In addition to this, as most refugees in Turkey live in urban areas, there is a natural segregation between ethnic groups but also between social classes. Thus, there is almost no contact between ethnicities. It should also be stated that Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) planners also took divisions within Syrian society into account when planning and implementing their refugee camps. This said, xenophobia is rising in Turkey towards refugees.

³³ Georg Gassauer, Interview with Evangelos Kalpadakis, 14 April 2016.

resources has ensured that many municipalities rely on volunteer and Anarchist groups to provide basic assistance for shelter and food distribution.

Off the record, some European analysts and senior diplomats have stated that this “structured deterioration” of the Hotspots is by design and is intended to act as a form of psychological deterrence to potential refugees idling in Turkey. To cement this argument, they point to the low arrival rates on the islands. However, even if this were true, this seems more of a macabre excuse for a failure to prepare as it is unrealistic that the target audience of such a campaign, urban refugees in Gaziantep, Mersin or Antakya,³⁴ seems to be aware of the desolate living conditions. Most of those arriving in Turkey escaped either a brutal Syrian government bombing campaign, the wrath of radical jihadist movements, poverty in their home countries – or in the case of many Afghans – refugee status in Iran, and are biding their time until the borders open.

To quote one Syrian refugee’s response in Gaziantep when presented with the pictures of the scenario on Chios: “the hardest part of my journey was the 20-km stretch through the tunnels out of Syria. As the frontlines shift every day we were uncertain whether we would emerge in ISIS or government territory. Either way it would have ended badly. Sitting on a Greek island in the EU and in those conditions, is hardly challenging.” And this is a Syrian with the privilege of a *Temporary Protection Status* in Turkey.³⁵

Afghan and Iraqi refugees/migrants on the other hand, live a more camouflaged and clandestine life in Turkey’s major cities and are difficult to interview as they fear immediate deportation if caught as they are awarded the status of “illegal aliens.” As no comprehensive studies have been commissioned about the true migrant composition in Turkey, it is difficult to assess how many of those currently residing in Turkey would decide to leave if the statement is abruptly annulled³⁶.

³⁴Of the 3.5 million registered Syrians with temporary protection status, 60% live in urban centers in southeastern Turkey while 15% live in Istanbul, 5% in Izmir, and only 10% live in the internationally praised AFAD refugee camps. This meant that roughly 90% of Syrians in Turkey live in an urban center and are not given the privileges that the Turkish government has awarded those in living in the camps.

³⁵In Turkey the black labor market conditions for Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis are difficult. In particular for children who are much cheaper in the core labor intensive sectors of the economy such as construction, textiles, and agriculture. Although heavily contested by the Turkish government, who officially state that every individual with temporary protection can access the labor market, current labor laws state that a company can only employ foreigners as long as the 9/1 ratio is met. Thus with a high unemployment rate – officially 10% are unemployed, however unofficially it is closer to 25% – it is difficult to employ Syrians legally. Exposed to this over abundance of manual labor, competition for work is fierce, pushing many Syrians to underbid the Turkish workers and their compatriots. In many cases employers prefer children between 12 and 15 (Hayeta Destek, 2016). This has rekindled and inflamed anti-Arab sentiment and driving xenophobia in Turkey placing the Turkish leadership in a conundrum as this competition for labor directly affects the traditional AKP voting base.

³⁶ Although the EU-Turkey agreement may have ceased the flow of refugees to Greece, the flow from Afghanistan and the refugee camps in Iran took months to come to a stop. Thus a backlog of Afghans has formed in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul and Izmir, that NGOs estimate to be between 300,000 and 350,000. A factor that should not be missed is the North Africans that would take advantage of low cost flights to Izmir and Istanbul with Turkish Airlines and Air Algérie and can mobilize at a very short notice. Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian citizens are allowed a 30-day visa to Turkey.

5.0 Anti-establishmentarianism

Nonetheless, as European governments continue to neglect the severity of the living conditions in refugee camps, a vacuum has formed that is providing ample room for anti-establishment elements to sow the seeds for future disruptions. Organized crime syndicates and radical religious (predominantly Islamic) or political (anarchist) movements are finding new recruits in the thousands of young, disillusioned, and uneducated Muslim men stranded along the Balkan route³⁷. Additionally, the camps are easily infiltrated by intelligence agencies from Syria, Iraq and Iran (Muhaberat), looking for wanted individuals or to spread a message of fear into refugee communities³⁸.

Although this infiltration of foreign intelligence services is documented by social workers throughout camps in Europe, these reports go largely unnoticed by national security agencies³⁹. European intelligence officers, whose identities remain confidential, confess that although they are aware of this, current counter-intelligence operations are not equipped to undertake decisive action, referring to a lack of resources devoted to gathering the necessary human intelligence and that they must predominantly rely on open source surveys and monitoring English or German social media channels.

6.0 Damaged Tourism Brands

The refugee movements have also negatively affected the Aegean's main source of income: tourism. As the brands of these once peaceful holiday destinations have become marred with the images of desperate refugees fleeing war and poverty, many tourists from northern European countries have decided to spend their summer holidays elsewhere. As a result, tourist arrivals saw a sharp decline in 2016 on both sides of the Aegean⁴⁰. On Samos for example, there was a decrease in tourism arrivals of 60%, compared to previous seasons⁴¹.

³⁷Shams Ul-Haq, *Die Brutstätte der Terrors* (Bernau: SWB Media Publishing, 2016).

³⁸Georg Gassauer, interview with various refugees in Tabanovce FYROM (14 March 2016) Idomemi, Greece (27 March 2016) Samos, Greece (05 June 2016).

³⁹Georg Gassauer, Interview with Arbeiter Samariter Bund (ASB) Social Worker, (11 August 2016).

⁴⁰In the Izmir region, the tourism authority quietly noted that in addition to the threat of terrorism and Russian economic sanctions, their own governments diplomatic rift with Austria, Germany, and Sweden (their strongest receiving countries) between April and August 2016 as well as the perception of Turkey as an active enforcer of refugee flows, were an additional and very strong factor in the 90% decline in revenue from tourism. By stark contrast, arrivals from Holland and the UK, countries less affected by the strong refugee flows of 2015, saw a very small increase.

⁴¹Georg Gassauer, Interview with Elena Housni, Ombudswoman of Samos, 01 June 2016.

Financially, this hits municipalities doubly hard as local councils have financed most of the critical infrastructure and local humanitarian programs for refugees. With no new sources of alternative income, municipalities now face severe cash flow problems⁴² as the promises made by the central government to reimburse these investments fail to materialize citizens are turning their frustration toward their municipalities. Even when funding is designated, local requirements are often disregarded⁴³.

Mayors across Greece scornfully note that the strong connection built between them and their constituents continues to erode. This additional burden now placed on the municipalities through the refugee crisis comes at the heels of the financial adjustment agreements between Greece and its debtors. Bearing in mind that many of the mayors had to implement the unpopular austerity measures, they feel disappointed by the lack of guidance and support from their central government.

As the number of refugees have been compounding on the islands, tensions have also increased between local communities and the refugee population. Although this should not be over-exaggerated, as this is only localized to specific parts of the islands, patterns are already emerging of petty theft and interethnic gang violence. Already cash-strapped municipalities have begun to employ more police officers or private security firms to provide a sense of safety on islands that used to have almost 0% crime.

However, interviewing community stakeholders it becomes more evident that an overreliance on the stability of the EUTS is creating an atmosphere of insecurity and stress. This is well founded as there is no longer a capacity on the islands to absorb more refugees should the deal be annulled, with no official Plan B, municipality representatives warn that a total system collapse on the islands could be caused by as little as 2,000 new arrivals on a single day!

⁴² Despite government guarantees that they will cover refugee related costs, the municipality of Chios has spent an average of €25,000 a month on refugee-related matters since March 2016. Although the mayor remains optimistic that this will be paid, he is uncertain about when.

⁴³ In one extreme example, the central government constructed a new water distribution system to the Souda Hotspot on the island of Chios. Although this was necessary, little consideration was made for local conditions. Upon completion, the new system ensured that refugees received almost twice as much water than residents and was very difficult for the mayor to defend considering there is a water shortage on the island.

Conclusions

The European response to the refugee crisis has shown to be effective in achieving its primary goal: to disrupt the smuggling networks and reduce the flow of refugees and migrants crossing the Aegean, and moving on towards Central Europe. It should be highlighted that the Balkan-route closure and the EUTS are improvised and by design short-term solutions used to halt the high influx of irregular migrant. As such unforeseen turbulences have emerged as a result of faulty implementation. This casts serious doubt over the long-term sustainability of the response. Specifically, a failing situational awareness by senior policy makers caused by missing and critical quality management mechanisms ensures that these responses are implemented on an *ad hoc* basis rather than through well-thought out guidelines. This leaves room for a marked decline in human security in camps; disillusionment by those servicing the policy-mechanisms in their senior management; and ultimately this is eroding the confidence between citizens and their governing bodies.

Internationally, political differences within EU member States following the implementation of the EUTS has led to a stagnation in creating concrete emergency policies, should either the EUTS and subsequently the Balkan Route Closure be upended. This stagnation has allowed the Turkish leadership to undertake dramatic domestic reform policies that stand in contradiction with the human rights based foreign policy of the EU. Reforms, it should be noted, that would have been unacceptable and would have possibly invoked sanctions before March 2016. However, as Europe has not made any visible preparations for a fall-out in the last twelve months they have maneuvered European continental security into a relationship of dependence with Turkey. In turn, they have also become a complicit bystander to a fundamental transformation in Turkish politics and society.

References

Di Lorenzo, G. (04. 09 2016). Commentary. (C. Schwennicke, Hrsg.) *Cicero*.

ECHO (2016). *Humanitarian Implementation Plan for Turkey*. European Commission Humanitarian Office , Ankara .

ESI (2016). On Solid Ground? Eleven facts about the EU-Turkey Agreement. *European Stability Initiative*. 12 September 2016.

European Commission (2016). Asylum Procedures: Reforming the Common European Asylum System. 04 September 2016

European Commission (2016). Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. 14 September 2016

European Commission (2016). Managing the Refugee Crisis: EU Financial Support to Greece. 3 September 2016

European Commission. (2016). Proposal, European Commission, Brussels. *COM(2016)272 final*.

European Commission (2016). *Commission Recommendation (EU) 2016/2256*. Brussels.

European Commission (2016). The Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

European Commission (2016). *European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations*. September 2016.

IOM (2016). Migrant Presence Monitoring. *Situation Report July, 2016*.

Kingsly, P. (2016). Prisoners of Europe': the everyday humiliation of refugees stuck in Greece. *theguardian.com*.

Kingsly, P. (2016). Reformed Greek appeals panel upholds Syrian refugee's deportation. *theguardian.com*.

ODI. (2016). *Europe's refugees and migrants: hidden flows, tightened borders and spiralling costs*. Overseas Development Institute. London: ODI.

Özden, S. (2013). *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*. European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Migration Policy Centre. Italy: European University Institute.

Pettifer, J. (1998). *The Turkish Labyrinth*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Riegert, B. (2016). EU-Turkey refugee deal hinges on Greece. *Deutsche Welle Online*.

Syria Centre for Policy Research. (2015). *Syria: Alienation and Violence, Impact of Syria Crisis Report 2014*. London.

Tremblay, P. (2014). Anti-Arab sentiment on rise in Turkey. *Al-Monitor*.

Ul-Haq, S. (2016). *Die Brutstätte der Terrors*. Bernau: SWB Media Publishing.

UNHCR (2017). *Greece Data Snap Shot 12 February 2017*. Athens, Greece.

UNHCR (2016) Syrian Regional Refugee Response. *unhcr.org*.

UNHCR (2015). UNHCR warns of growing asylum crisis in Greece and the Western Balkans amid arrivals of refugees from war. July 2015.

World Bank. (2014). *The World Bank and the Impact of the Syrian Crisis*. World Bank. Washington: World Bank.

Yassin-Kassab, R., & Al-Shami, L. (2016). *Burning Country*. London, UK: PI

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georg Gassauer, was chief operating officer at Train of Hope, Vienna and oversaw the transit of 150,000+ refugees through Vienna between August 2015 and January 2016. Currently, he is an independent researcher associated with Princeton University's Liechtenstein Institute on Self Determination. Researching. He travelled overland from Vienna to the Syrian border towns of Reylhani and Kilis, conducted interviews during a 16 week period with frontline stakeholders and numerous visitations to camps, Hot Spots, and city districts in Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, FYROM, Greece and Turkey. He has previously been engaged with the OSCEs Special Representative on Human Trafficking, UNODC and the Austrian Embassy in Lagos, Nigeria. He graduated from the University of Exeter, UK, in International Relations specialising in European migration and Middle East politics and earned an MSc in Environmental Technology and International Affairs from the Technical University and Diplomatic Academy in Vienna.